

A Teetotaler's Story.

Among the energetic workers of the present day, the teetotalers are unquestionably entitled to take a first place. We, who are no teetotalers, cheerfully admit this. We have seen the fruits of their labors, and can bear witness that they are good. We have seen them raise from the very sinks of vice and depravity men whom every other missionary had abandoned in despair. We know many whom they have elevated from pauperism into comfort, from pollution into cleanliness, from degradation into respectability, from habitual drunkenness into habitual sobriety.

Many are the thrilling tales that teetotalers could tell, of men dragged from the slough of sin into the pure air and sun-light of social well-being and well-doing. But teetotalers are not literary; the hardest workers among them are working men, who have been their own educators. They have no time to write tales, even if they had the literary culture. But teetotal literature is advancing, and the day may come when some genius will do for the drunkards what Mrs. Stowe has done for the American slaves,—stir up a universal desire to alleviate their lot, and rescue them from the depths of vice and misery.

We shall never forget a tale of a rescued drunkard, told by one of the teetotal lecturers. It was a statement of his own experience, and its truth can at this day be attested by thousands. The story was told in a rather broad Lancashire dialect, for the speaker had originally been a factory workman, and had raised himself by his own industry and energy, chiefly in this very teetotal cause, to a respectable and highly useful position in society. We despair of being able to impart to our readers the full force of the story as told by the narrator, or to produce anything like the thrilling effect which he produced upon the meeting in question,—for there is an electric influence in the spoken words, which is lost when it is attempted to commit them to written paper:—

"I was out on my first teetotal journey," said the narrator, "and was very new to my mission. I remember that I was dressed in a velvet coat, with white mother-of-pearl buttons,—just a raw factory lad, full of enthusiasm for the cause; but that is worth a good deal, as you know."

"I reached a town in the north of England. It was a fine summer evening, when I went out into the market place to address the people. I borrowed a chair from a poor woman,—after being rebuffed from several doors,—and carrying it into an open space, near which some children were playing, and laboring people sauntering about after their day's work, I planted the chair there, mounted it, and began to speak—not without some great flutterings at heart, and serious qualms as to the success of my speech.

"At the sound of my voice the children ceased from their play and gathered round me, and several of the saunterers also turned aside to hear what I had got to say. At first, some thought I was selling pills; others took me for a Mormon; and when I began to talk about teetotalism,—this new-fangled doctrine of abstaining altogether from intoxicating drink,—my slender audience began to giggle, some of them jeered at 'fustian-jacket,' and several of them guffawed outright. This was not a very encouraging beginning for a raw speaker.

"While I was still talking, I saw a drunken man swaggering along in the distance, with a lot of boys about him calling out names and provoking him to swear at them in return. He seemed to notice the little group collected about me, and, like most drunken men

when they see a crowd, he at once made toward us. Now, thought I, my evening's work is fairly spoilt; this drunken fellow will put the finisher to my speech; as he came rolling along, some of the crowd gleefully called out, as if they expected a row, 'Here comes Charley Brown—a real teetotaler; hurrah for Charley!'" The children set up a shout; the drunken man staggered in among the audience; and I went on with my speech.

"I could not keep my eyes off the man; he was a frightful example of the degradation to which habitual drunkenness may bring one. He was tall and powerfully made, but he was clothed in rags, dirty and unkempt, and his face was one mass of red blotch. The man fixed his drunken eyes upon me as I spoke, and I felt encouraged by his attention, degraded and outcast though he looked. I went on, in homely words drawing a picture of the wretched life of the drunkard, his beggared home, his neglected children, and his ruined wife; and urged again and again that the only radical cure was the teetotal one,—abstinence at once and forever from all intoxicating drinks.

"By this time some other tipsy men had joined the audience, and I was told that a beer-shop keeper was among them, who kept up a fire of interruptions, shouting out, 'It's a lie!' 'You're a fool!' and such like; and pieces of rubbish and dirt began to be thrown at me from the outskirts of the crowd.

"At this, the drunken man, whom the crowd had saluted by the name of 'Charley,' strode forward, and pushing his way up to where I stood, stretched forth his hand to me. My first thought was, that he meant to pull me down from my chair, and the delighted audience thought so too; but the man called out instead, that I must 'shake hands with him,' which I did at once; and then the man, clapping me on the shoulder, called out, 'Go on, good lad, and let Charley Brown see the man that dares to meddle wi' you!'

"As I afterwards learnt, this Charley was the terror of his neighborhood; he was the greatest fighter in the place, and his bashed face bore many evidences of his pugilism as well as of his drunkenness. So his patronage at once quelled the rising insults of the crowd, and I was permitted quietly to finish my address. At the end, I offered to take the names of any persons present who might be disposed to join the Teetotal Society, and to my surprise,—I may almost say to my dismay,—the only one who offered to join was the drunken man 'Charley.' I, of course, regarded his taking the pledge as a joke, and offered to defer it until the following morning. 'No!' said he, 'now, now,—I'm your man.' So I took his pledge,—I confess reluctantly, and amidst much laughter. No other dared to follow his example,—it seemed only too ludicrous.

"Well I returned the chair to the poor woman from whom I had borrowed it, and was about to proceed towards my humble lodging; but Charley would not leave me. He insisted on accompanying me, arm-in-arm, across the market-place, down the High Street,—people coming to their doors to see us pass, and wondering what new mischief the drunken pest had been brewing. Charley even insisted on my going to his house to see his wife and family. I consented to go, for I found I could not shake him off; and I was afterwards glad I went.

"I was introduced to the Drunkard's Home, and a more destitute, wretched home I never entered.—Down several steps from the street, in a house situated in one of the poorest

districts of the place, I landed on the clay floor of Charley Brown's hovel! his wife, ragged and heart-broken, sat by the hearth, with a crying child on her knee, add others about her feet. There was scarcely a scrap of furniture in the room; it had been broken to pieces during the drunken outbreaks of her husband, or pawned by him to supply his ravenous appetite for drink. The children were ragged and dirty. There was no place for me to sit down upon, but I stood for a few minutes and told the trembling wife what was my errand to the town, what her husband had that night promised me—that he would entirely abstain from drink in the future; and turning to him, said I,—'Charley, I hope you will keep your promise LIKE A MAN!' 'I will!' said he, 'I am determined that I will; and you shall see.' I confess that I despaired! the case seemed so hopeless. Nevertheless, I tried to hope and I encouraged him as well as I could, and urged his wife to aid him in his good resolution.

"The poor woman told me her brief and pitiful story. When she married Charley Brown, he was the handsomest fellow in the place, one of the best workmen, though rather 'gay.' He was a bootmaker by trade, and when he stuck to his work he could make from 30s to £2 a week. But latterly, he had been making very short time, and everything that he made, as well as all their furniture and most of their clothing, had gone for drink. It was a story similar to thousands more,—fit to make the heart bleed.

"I took my leave, but promised to call in the morning before leaving town. I did so, and found Charley at his work. He was now quite sober, and distinctly remembered his promise of the previous night. He still said that he was resolved to keep the pledge, and that he would do so. My hopes about the man were now raised, though they were still very weak; and encouraging him to abide by his good resolution, I left him.

"A year passed, and I revisited the town. Of course, my first thought was, what had become of Charley Brown. Often had I reflected about my first visit, and my one convert; and I wondered whether a character so desperate could by this or any other means be made good for anything. Charley being what is called a 'notorious character' in the town, I had no difficulty in finding him out, though he had removed to another quarter. I knocked at his door, and was admitted. Could I believe my eyes? Was this clean and contented looking woman the same whom, wretched and ragged, I had visited in the drunkard's home in — Street but a short year ago? Were these healthy children the same that I had seen, peevish and dirty, sprawling on the mud floor of the old beggar's hovel? It was indeed so! The woman sprang to me with a 'God bless you, sir! God bless you!' and shook me cordially by the hand. 'Oh, how much we owe you, sir,—come in, come in!'

"The woman's eyes sparkled with pleasure. She could not do too much for me,—offered me the best chair to sit down upon, insisted I should have tea and cake, that I must wait until Charley came in—he would be back presently; and I was resolved to see him, for already I saw clearly enough that the cure was fairly at work, and that the drunken convert had unexpectedly proved a good and true man.

"Of course, I inquired into the cause of the immense improvement which I saw every where around me, in the wife and children, in the furniture of the dwelling, and in the air and comfort which pervaded the place. The story was soon told. 'Charley had kept the pledge. It was a terrible struggle with him at first; but he is

a man of strong will and great force of purpose; so he persevered,—gave up his former acquaintances,—abandoned the drinking houses, and stuck to his work. You know, Charles is a capital workman,—the best bootmaker in the place, sir. So the wages came in on Saturday nights regular. We soon redeemed our furniture and eight-day clock, which lay in pledge; bought better food and better clothes; and a month or two since, we removed to this better house. We have now all that we need to make us comfortable; and if Charles perseveres, by God's blessing, we shall be an honor to the cause in this place, sir. Only last night Charles was speaking of sending the youngest boy to school, where the others already are; and then we shall all be in the way of becoming wiser and better. Oh, sir, it was a blessed day for us, that which brought you to this place, and led Charles to take that pledge. It has been the making of us all.' And the tears were now standing full in her eyes, and dropping down her cheeks. For me, I was quite overcome by her story, and felt more encouraged to persevere in the work than ever I had done before.

"Charley soon made his appearance; he had been carrying home some of his work. The alteration in his appearance was so great that I could scarcely have recognized him; he was clean and well dressed; and on conversing with him I found him intelligent and manly—really a fine hearted fellow at bottom, though his better qualities as a man had so long been obscured and blighted by the accursed drink. We had some delightful conversation together, and the upshot of it was, that a teetotal meeting was determined on for the following evening, when Charley was to appear by me on the platform. The meeting took place, and it was a most successful one. The ice had been fairly broken, and the cause now made steady progress in the town.

"Years passed, and I again visited the scene of my early labors. I wrote to my friend Charles that I was coming by the coach on such a day; and as we drove up to the inn where the coach halted, who should be there but my friend Charles, more improved than ever in appearance. He was now dressed in superfine cloth, and was as spruce as a shopkeeper. He insisted on carrying my carpet bag, but I almost thought shame to allow him to do so, it seemed so much beneath his appearance.

"You will scarcely know us now, sir,—the good cause has prospered us so much."

"I was surprised, indeed, when he led me into the market place; and there pointing to a sign-board over a respectable looking shop, I read the words, in gold letters,—CHARLES BROWN, BOOTMAKER. I was indeed amazed! My astonishment was increased when, entering his shop, and passing the valuable stock of goods which it contained, I was introduced upstairs into a comfortable, even handsomely furnished room, where the tea-things were set out upon the table, and 'Mrs. Brown' was anxiously waiting to give me a hearty welcome.

"I need not pursue my story further. Charles Brown is one of the most respectable, respected, and thriving inhabitants of his native town; he is a voter for a member of Parliament, and what is better, is himself a member of a Christian church; and I cite him wherever I go, as one of the most memorable and blessed instances of the renovating, life-giving, and happiness-bestowing power of Teetotalism."

* * Rogers, the venerable author of the "Pleasures of Memory" is still living in a charming mansion in St. James Place, London.

* We do not mention the real names, as the parties are alive; but the facts of the story are stated.